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ABSTRACT

This monograph suggests various counseling techniques for enhancing the self-esteem of minorities. A frame of reference is presented for considering minority group self-esteem. Themes related to minority group perspectives and their existence in the writings of psychotherapists are reviewed. A section on cultural diversity discusses the family, religion, and value orientation as important factors in the counseling process. Theoretical orientations regarding love and choice as sources of power in human beings are described and the client's and counselor's humanness are emphasized, with implications for the counselor's behavior. Because counseling is perceived as an unfamiliar activity resembling a "forced friendship," the interview and techniques are considered within this context. The initial interview is discussed and issues such as seating arrangements, structuring, and names and titles of address are included. Suggestions for counseling improvement and guidelines for counselor behaviors are offered. (Author/NRB)

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Counseling Approaches for Enhancing Self-Esteem of Minorities

by

Dorothy Kim Singleton

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To

William C. Singleton

and

Clemmont E. Vontress

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COUNSELING APPROACHES FOR ENHANCING SELF-ESTEEM OF MINORITIES

Dorothy Kim Singleton

The approach most useful for enhancing the self-esteem of minorities is one which views clients as human beings and appreciates the qualities of their humanness. This monograph presents a frame of reference for considering minority group self-esteem and discusses the family, religion, and value orientation as important factors in the counseling process. Theoretical orientations regarding love and choice are presented, with implications for counselor behaviors. Because counseling is perceived as an unfamiliar activity resembling a "forced friendship," the interview and techniques are considered within this context with suggestions for improvement and guidelines for counselor behavior.

Self-Esteem: A Frame of Reference

In American culture value is placed on achievement, education and material wealth. These conditions appear to represent the ideals for persons who are to receive communal acceptance and the respect associated with status, increased knowledge and skills derived from education, and the greater material comforts and security that accompany wealth. These conditions are believed also to influence favorable self-evaluations. It is within this context that standards for success, effective functioning, and insight into the value orientation of Americans can be inferred. Another widely held belief is that all Americans have equal access and opportunity to realize these ideals given the proper initiative, drive, and hard work, and that those persons or groups who do not must have something wrong with them.

Attempts to enhance self-esteem in minorities implies that there is a deficiency. Consider the assumptions underlying most such attempts:

(a) Dominant cultural group standards are the good, right, and acceptable model for all Americans; (b) Variation from these standards represents deficits in the modes of persons from other subcultural groups; (c) Recognizing the standards as good and right and learning to function within their limits will enhance self-esteem. The difficulty here is obvious: The presumption is that other standards are in some way deficient. The idea of a deficit implies deficiency in a normally expected phenomenon (Fowler, 1971). The concept seems to focus on the dominant group cultural experiences deemed necessary for the development of competent and effective behavior when, in the case of minority group self-esteem, normal and certainly not ideal conditions for development hardly ever exist. Instead, they are found in infinite combinations. The concept of deficit can only be understood in relation to the accepted frames of reference (ibid.), and this view partly reflects the distinctly different experiences found in a dominant group.

Self-esteem, as defined by various authors, encompasses the ideas, feelings, and strivings that are recognized, interpreted, and valued by individuals as their own (English & English, 1958); the value of individuals' worth as human beings created in the image of God (Meagher, Briem, & Aherne, 1979); a sense of being, based on the reflected appraisals of others (Mead, 1934); or personal judgments of worthiness expressed in the attitudes individuals hold toward themselves (Coopersmith, 1968). Although people may experience momentary or situational shifts in self-evaluations, self-esteem is considered to be an enduring attribute (Wolman, 1977). It is a judgmental process in which individuals examine their performance, capacities, and attributes according to their own personal standards and values and reach decisions about their personal worth (Coopersmith, 1967).

The environment of minorities has been characterized historically as restrictive--as one denying equal access to material goods and placing severe limitations on cultural experiences and potential range of associations. When minority group self-esteem is viewed from this perspective, there would appear to be need for enhancement,

especially since persons become attached to their own cultural values; are inclined to become ethnocentric over them; and, when unchecked, perceive, describe and evaluate others by personal standards and values, which prevents fruitful clarification and comparison (Kroeber, 1952). The frames of reference from which racial or ethnic groups develop are unique and are integral to the groups' functioning. Although restrictive and less than ideal environmental conditions have existed over a long period of time, they have included potential for positive growth and development and standards for healthy self-concepts which vary from those of the dominant group.

Whenever groups of people are separated for whatever reason, each group in time develops its own folkways, habit patterns, approaches for coping with the environment, and ways of relating to members of its own group and others (Vontress, 1974). While these phenomena may differ from those of a dominant group, they cannot automatically be assumed to be deficient. Minorities usually think, feel, and act as they do because they were brought up in a culture in which these ways were accepted--not only as good and right but as natural (Brown, 1963). Since values define for an individual or social unit what ends or means to an end are desirable (English & English, 1958), expectations for appropriate behaviors and feelings about oneself emerge from the minority group's immediate interpersonal environment. This observation has been confirmed in studies on self-esteem. Coopersmith (1967, 1968). for example, found that persons tended to gauge their individual worth primarily by their achievements and the value preferences in their own interpersonal environment rather than by more general and abstract sociocultural standards.

The question of who constitutes a minority must not confound the issue. The focus is on racial and ethnic groups in America whose minority status is permanent--persons with readily-identifiable, distinguishing physical characteristics such as color and curl of hair, and with a history of exclusionist legislation and/or discriminatory practices which have confined them to a certain status. The status of

a second type of minority group is situational. Such persons live temporarily or have settled in countries other than their own. They have the option, however, of moving or returning to their own culture. A third category of self-imposed minority status exists when persons, through differentiation of roles, have created "unique value systems according to sex role, life style or social status" (Pederson, Lonner, & Draguns, 1976, p. 18). Persons in this category may also fall in one of the first two categories and thereby become "double-minorities."

Psychotherapist Themes

Themes related to minority group perspectives and existence can be found in the writings of psychotherapists. May (1973) observed that the extent to which an individual's sense of existence is authentic is not what others have told the person what he or she should be but, rather, is the point from which he/she has to judge the validity of what parents and other authorities demand. May explained further that a person's sense of being which is the basis for self-esteem is not just the reflection of others' views, because if one's "self-esteem must rest in the long run on social validation, you have, not self-esteem but a more sophisticated form of social conformity" (May, 1973, p. 112).

From his experiences, Frankl (1963) came to understand that even in a severely restrictive and hostile environment, one can achieve fulfillment and bliss, if only briefly, from one's loved ones, in and through love. Moreover, humans are able to live and even die for the sake of their ideals and values. Frankl's account of his experiences is especially helpful as a starting point for persons, counselors if they will, to examine their perceptions of an adverse environmental situation in a different light. Simmel (1964) has aptly pointed out that all of us can look at the same situation but see different things.

Rogers' (1961) view can also be helpful in understanding the

experiences and perspectives of minorities. He observed an increasingly common pattern wherein members of a group believe that every other member should feel and think as the group does. Group members seem to find it difficult to permit others to feel different about particular problems or issues, to differ physically, or to utilize experiences in differing ways. The right of individuals to utilize their experiences in their own ways and to invest their own meanings into those experiences, however, is one of the most "priceless potentialities in life" (p. 21).

Cultural Diversity

Minority Groups

Complex societies like the United States of America contain many ethnic and regional subcultures rather than one homogeneous culture (Simpson & Yinger, 1953). The most readily identifiable minority groups in America are Asian Americans, Americans of African descent, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. These groups have all experienced exclusionist legislation and/or discriminatory practices. Groups who came from other countries and cultures, either voluntarily or by force, were thrust into a culture which routinely subordinated non-white peoples. Each group, although a part of the larger culture, came to consider its way of life natural, and while they all identified themselves as Americans, their loyalty was to their immediate reference group (Vontress, 1974)--it would seem for survival.

The restrictive environmental conditions under which minority groups have lived can be viewed either negatively or positively, depending upon who is making the judgment. Frankl's (1963) poignant description of a group's experiences in a prison camp sheds light on how positive experiences can emerge even under devastating environmental conditions. Examples of negative perceptions of minority group experiences can be found in most documents examining some aspect of minority group existence, especially when the knowledge and perceptions

of the group have been defined by the interests of those doing the defining.

Minorities understand the realities of their own environment, and many have acknowledged and learned to cope with the restrictions and discriminatory practices which are a part of that environment. At varying levels, many minorities have also shown by example that even in the most adverse or painful situation, they still have and can exercise personal choice. Such freedom of choice comes partly from the social support within the group itself.

The Family

The minority group family provides a framework wherein family members can deal with a number of economic, mental health, and educational issues and problems caused by their minority status. Kinship networks help to satisfy important cultural needs for intimacy and interpersonal relations (Sue, 1977). Some cultures stress the idea that interpersonal bonds should be continuous so that the individual's self-esteem and future are tied to the family and kin (Hsu, 1971). Among minority groups it is common to find extended families where more than one generation lives in the same household, where formalized kinship relations such as the "compadrazgo, godfather system" (Padillo & Ruiz, 1977, p. 403) exist, and where loyalty to the family takes precedence over other social institutions. In varying degrees, family helping networks provide emotional support, advice, and financial assistance to other family members, as well as pooling of incomes, with each working person within the household contributing to the overall household expenses (Christensen, 1975; Fong, 1973; Kitano, 1969; McAdoo, 1979; Spang, 1965; Sue, 1977).

The attitude of helping one another that exists in minority group families may well occur because they do not perceive community social agencies to be sensitive to their concerns and they view the family as their only source of help in times of future need. McAdoo (1979) referred to these patterns as "a kind of kin insurance" (p. 110),

observing that their persistence suggests that they are more than coping strategies; rather, they are cultural patterns. Children occupy a special place in the families of most minorities (McAdoo, 1979; Padilla & Ruiz, 1977; Spang, 1971). The love and protection of children are pronounced and serve to create an environment in which children can develop strong feelings of self-worth despite the lingering effects of discrimination and racism (McAdoo, 1979). In some instances, minority group families function as buffers against society's attempt to impose a negative self-image (Smith, 1977). Larkin (1972) has observed that the effect on children of being given inferior status by the larger society may strengthen their ties to the family as a reference group rather than depress their self-esteem.

Religion

Religion plays a significant role in the lives of minorities. It provides the medium through which members deal with forces and powers that are both mysterious and beyond rational control (Brown, 1963) and provides a basis for social cohesion and support (Frazier, 1963; Simpson & Yinger, 1953). Historically, the minority church has been a resource for personal counseling, a place where minorities are accorded personal respect and given opportunities to hold positions of responsibility, and a refuge from a hostile environment.

Value Orientation

The Native American value orientation is helpful in illustrating ways in which the frames of reference of minorities differ from those of the dominant group. The Native American value system is sensitive and humanistically-oriented (Spang, 1965). Insight into this system can be seen in the Native American's preference for cooperation over competition, for sharing and saving behavior, and for a focus on the present rather than on the future (Spang, 1971; Zintz, 1963). Sue and Sue (1977) have analyzed value differences among minority groups, information which is useful in understanding frames of reference.

The family and religion offer sources of support for minority group persons. They provide the interpersonal environment in which a sense of unity and self-esteem can grow. Because of differences in their environmental and cultural situations, minorities perceive reality in different ways. To ignore the premises underlying the perceptions of their situations will often result in failure to communicate and to establish a basis upon which future relationships can be built.

Theoretical Implications

Humanness

Frankl (1963) observed that the salvation of humankind is through love, for in loving and being loved individuals find a sense of self-worth, self-respect, and self-dignity. In interacting with others, whether they be persons of one's own or another cultural group, the involvement is with other human beings, with persons who also are capable and needful of humanness, caring, and love.

In their humanness, individuals have the ability to respond freely to present and past influences rather than to be defined by public opinion (Van Kaam, 1966). The very quality of humanness carries with it certain properties which are not necessarily dependent upon other people. The capacity to think, to love, to care, and to choose are givens which endow human beings with personal freedom and control. When individuals recognize and understand the power of these gifts (and they <u>are</u> spiritual gifts), it is clear that no human being can exercise control over another unless permitted to do so.

Love and Choice

The capacities to love and to choose are sources of power within a human being. Love is a freeing agent because of its potential for stimulating change in the person loving and in the one(s) who is loved. Love can outlast anything; it knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can stand when all else is

fallen (I Corinthians 13). Knowing that this capacity for love is present within every individual helps each of us to realize our enormous value as human beings. Personal recognition of our value as human beings is tremendous progress toward understanding the meaning and power of our capacity to choose. Exercising the power to choose leads to individual freedom, to the understanding that options exist and that one may guide one's own destiny.

In varying degrees, people recognize and utilize these human properties depending upon environmental influences and circumstances--which affect but do not determine the use of personal power. The life situation does not totally govern the person. Yet, daily situations can have influence on persons' lives which they may find well nigh impossible to escape, but individuals can still shape and make meaningful personal responses to their life situations. There are some persons who, for whatever reasons, relinquish their personal power by permitting others to define their existence, but the power still rests within the person.

Permitting love to be released and choosing are not always easy; more often than not, they are both difficult and painful. Nevertheless, persons can not only decide what shall become of them mentally and spiritually but can also retain their dignity. It is this freedom, which cannot be taken away, that makes life meaningful and purposeful (Frankl, 1963).

Within the psychotherapeutic environment, the first requirement is the acknowledgment of humanness by both participants. All other relationship factors, including choice of techniques, are subordinate to the attitude of acceptance and appreciation. Positive attitudes create positive interactions. The process of sharing can help others to consider the range of options open to them and to learn how to expand their freedom to function in, adjust to, or negotiate in their environment.

Counseling

As a casual but purposeful contact between persons, counseling is as old as humanity. As a professional activity in America it occurs in a variety of ways depending on the practitioner's point of view, background and training, and approach. Counseling has been described as "a process involving an interaction between counselor and client" (Pepinsky & Pepinsky, 1954, p. 3); "a dynamic and purposeful relationship between two people" (Wrenn, 1951, p. 60); "a two way affair" (English & English, 1958, p. 127); "a form of interviewing" (Wohlberg, 1967, p. 41); "a process of helping people to learn" (Krumboltz & Thoresen, 1976, p. 2). The theoretical orientation may be analytical, behavioral, experiential, rational, or various combinations of these and other approaches identified in psychotherapeutic literature.

While some progress has been made toward agreement on basic elements of counseling, it has been limited. With the diversity represented in the various approaches (Patterson, 1973), it is conceivable that the counseling activity could appear strange and confusing to persons who have either been given descriptions of it or exposed to the wide range of possible approaches.

Unfamiliarity with Counseling

It can be a sobering experience to learn that the professional activity for which one has spent many years preparing is alien to a large segment of the population. This observation was confirmed in a research counseling project (Singleton, 1976) involving minority group college students and during subsequent interactions with minority group persons in elementary and high schools, vocational rehabilitation and veterans administration facilities, and government agencies. Regardless of the mode used to inform the persons of its availability or engage them in the activity, there were recurring questions: "What is this counseling?" "What do you mean by counseling?"

The reader has probably noted that the term "counseling activity"

rather than "counseling relationship" has been used. Within the context of the discussion, the preference is for "counseling activity" because it more accurately describes the minority person's perception of the interaction at the point of initial contact, particularly with a minority group client/dominant group counselor combination. The term "activity" allows for the fact that positive relationship factors are not automatically active in the interactions.

It appears that, in general, minorities are unfamiliar with counseling as it is professionally defined in America, i.e., a one-to-one activity that encourages participants to talk about or discuss the most intimate aspects of their lives. Traditionally defined, counseling requires verbal interaction; requires that the interacting parties sit quietly together for given periods of time; and in some cases, requires that one party pay the other for participating in the activity. Consider, for a moment, similar situations in which helping services are rendered, sometimes for a fee: lawyer-client or physician-, dentist-, nurse-patient. These activities are of a helping nature and ideally require a "relationship," but there is also an identifiable and familiar service to be performed.

To some degree, a relationship implies interest, liking, acceptance, sincerity, honesty, understanding, trust, and caring. Consider, further, human situations in which these factors are likely to be evident: family, friendship, minister-parishioner; and situations in which they are assumed to be evident: teacher-student, counselor-counselee, therapist-client. The former situations involve persons who, through their attitudes and behavior, have probably demonstrated their concern and care. They are likely to be trusted and perceived to be persons to whom others could turn in time of need. The latter situations involve persons who are trained to perform helping functions, the success of which depends largely on relationship factors. Since relationships are based on knowing something about one another (Simmel, 1964), minority group persons, because of their experience with racism, may not perceive these helpers to possess the necessary caring and concern.

Torrey (1972) noted that humans always seem to have nonphysical concerns requiring them to seek help from a caring and concerned helper. Moreover, these caring activities are not the specialized functions of just the dominant group. In the lives of minorities, nonphysical concerns have been and, to some extent, are fulfilled by family, friends, ministers, and very often teachers. These individuals are sought out to perform these functions because they are perceived to be trustworthy, caring persons.

Forced Friendships

Counseling relationships follow the same racial and ethnic interaction patterns found in other forms of interpersonal contact (Sattler, 1970). In considering counseling interactions involving minorities, the historical discrimination against them must be noted because of the implications relating to the nature of the activity as well as to the requirements of persons who conduct the activity.

Self-disclosure is basic to counseling because it is the most direct means by which persons can make themselves known to others. In general, racial and ethnic minorities are reluctant to self-disclose or to let the counselor know what they think and feel. It has been suggested that this reluctance is related to their environment which they perceive as hostile (Sue & Sue, 1977; Vontress, 1974).

To be genuine, to be aware of one's own feelings, and to be able to express in words and behaviors the attitudes and feelings that exist inside oneself involves risk (Rogers, 1961). People will disclose their aims and the ways they perceive their world only to those whom they have reason to trust (Jourard, 1968). To expect the minority group client to express these feelings in a counseling activity, when the counselor's behavior is, more often than not, opposite and negative in most interactions outside of the actual counseling setting, is unrealistic. How can this contradictory behavior, apparent to minorities, facilitate growth in either party?

Counselors are essentially the same persons both inside and outside of the counseling activity. Matarazzo (1973), commenting on a series of studies of therapist and client interactions, noted that counselors behave in the interaction much as they do in any kind of human encounter, much as anyone knowing them would expect, for counselors are more themselves than any "caricature of some mystical entity" (p. 372). Counselors' contradictory behavior outside of the counseling activity raises a serious question about their authenticity. Can counselors, in fact, be genuine in counseling and not transfer the behavior outside of the setting? In light of these phenomena, it could well be that minorities consider the counseling activity to be a "forced friendship" and one which does not appear to operate in their best interest.

These observations are not made to imply that building relationships with minority group persons is impossible. They are made to stimulate counselors' gaining a new perspective regarding the assumptions they hold about counseling so that they can choose what they will be in their interactions with all clients, not only minorities. Part of this process is recognizing, understanding, and valuing the human capacity for love and choice. Knowledge precedes understanding. Recognition of self-worth is the first step in recognition of worth in others, and with it the capacity to love is released.

Counselor Behaviors

First and foremost, counselors are individual human beings; only secondarily are they members of a particular group called counselors (Matarazzo, 1973). When counselors acknowledge humanness, they can focus immediately on similarities rather than differences in physical characteristics, experiences, culture, language, and the like. Minorities possess the same basic needs as counselors, and these needs transcend cultural bounds. Knowing this can help counselors achieve the openness that will permit them to deal directly with whatever differences are likely to affect the interaction.

Counselor attitudes toward themselves and other persons will, to a large extent, determine the tone of the meeting. Much of the attitude of both counselor and client has to do with assumptions each has made about the other. Counselors cannot assume that minority group persons will have positive perceptions of the counseling activity because of their prior interpersonal experiences within America, nor can they assume that mere exposure of minorities to the counseling activity will be sufficient to alter these perceptions or create a climate in which a productive relationship can be built. Before solid rapport can occur, counselor and client must both work through their attitudes and come to see each other as individuals and human beings (Seward, 1956). If counselors are to assist others in this process, they must first have examined their own grasp of reality.

Working through attitudes and gaining a sense of reality can be realized by counselors through self-exploration and personal counseling. It is amazing to learn of the numbers of counselors and counselors-in-training who have neither experienced nor plan to experience professional counseling, an activity in which they spend or will spend a significant portion of their professional lives.

Personal counseling will help counselors to know and understand themselves and their own value frame of reference. This knowledge is necessary if they are to understand the value frames of reference for minorities, and to be truly sensitive to the needs of others as they are defined by others.

The most valuable resource in a counseling activity is the person. The self of the counselor is key to creating a climate conducive to growth in both the counselor and client. This requires that counselors be aware of their own emotional needs, attitudes, expectations, and rights and privileges in interactions with others. Some questions for consideration in self-exploration are:

What do I know about myself?

How do I define myself?

What do I believe about people and how they behave in stressful and unstressful situations?

How do I behave under similar conditions?

What is my attitude toward love and loving?

What conditions do I set for loving and how are they manifested in interactions with others?

In what natural ways do I respond to others and how do they compare with my behavior in the counseling activity?

How do I express and communicate care?

What stereotypes and biases do I hold about groups other than my own?

Because counselors deal with behavior, they must recognize that the way they look at themselves, other people, and their life situations determines what they will find, what conclusions they will draw, and how valid these conclusions will be.

Guidelines for Love

If counselors are in touch with their personal functioning, they are more likely to respond to clients as human beings. It is impossible to love, share, and care about others with fullness until one is first in touch with oneself. Self-exploration, self-understanding, and self-acceptance release the capacities for love and choice and permit caring and sharing. The most important guideline for creating a climate for positive interactions and building relationships is a simple one: Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them (Matthew 7:12).

Counselors are in a better position to do this if they have examined their own feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. They must not assume that

their training has bestowed upon them an understanding of their humanness--nor does the knowledge and use of therapeutic techniques supply what is needed to be effective human beings. Techniques augment; they help to accelerate a relationship. But people, through their humanness, use the tools or techniques to build productive relationships. Without human understanding, techniques are meaningless.

Starting Points

The starting point for counselors who wish to facilitate positive interactions with minorities, or any persons for that matter, rests with the counselors themselves.

1. Personally acknowledge that cultural diversity exists within America and that diversity implies difference, not inferiority.

2. Confront and resolve personal cultural biases through counseling. The outcomes can be twofold. One, by learning more about themselves, counselors can facilitate freedom to choose in all aspects of their lives. And two, counselors can experience, for the first time or anew, the activity in which they are professionally engaged and heighten their sensitivity to what it feels like to be counseled.

3. Increase knowledge of cultural variation through study and interpersonal contact, however individuals choose to define their contacts.

4. Expand interactions with both minority and dominant cultural group persons so as to grow as human beings.

5. Define and make a commitment to facilitate positive change in interactions with minority and dominant group persons.

If counselors are to be engaged in counseling activities and are unable to love and to care, they should give serious consideration to whether the decision to be or become professional counselors was right.

The Interview

Relationship or Encounter

The counseling activity has been found to be "little more than what occurs in most, if not all, social interactions and other important human pairings" (Matarazzo, 1973, p. 373). Counseling literature describes the meeting as a relationship characterized by positive interaction, acceptance, understanding, honesty, fluent verbal communication, openness (Patterson, 1973), psychological closeness, and human warmth (Brammer & Shostrom, 1977). If intergroup experiences have been positive in settings other than counseling, it is likely that participating parties will have mutual expectations in the interview. If they have not, participants are likely to enter the interview situation with ambiguous feelings about both the activity and each other.

Counseling interactions are like other social interactions except that the focus is on only one of the participants (Ford & Urban, 1963). Racism and its manifestations in the behavior of dominant group persons in America raise some question as to whether a counseling session involves a relationship or an encounter. May (1979) emphasized encounter rather than relationship because encounter requires that we ourselves be human beings in the broadest sense of the word and participate in the experiencing of the client. Encounter recognizes that each party may come to the interview with differing assumptions, frames of reference, attitudes, and expectations; that the interview is a meeting place where the differences may be explored, if needed, to learn about each person's culture; and that an opportunity exists to release the capacity to love. Encounter does not presume that each is beginning the interaction from the same reference point. A relationship does.

Individual counseling approaches all utilize the private interview in which verbal interaction is the major component and share the common element of a personal relationship (Patterson, 1973). Most approaches

include a "relationship" that is characterized by interest in and concern for clients, including a desire to help, influence, or change them. The crucial aspect of the counselor's impact or contribution is the client's perceptions of counselor characteristics and contributions. Thus, the client's characteristics, attitudes, and set are critical aspects of a relationship (Patterson, 1973).

Underlying factors in a true relationship include positive interactions between the persons involved, rapport, mutual trust and confidence, absence of threat, and honesty. While it is possible for these conditions to happen with minorities as well as with dominant cultural group clients, to assume that they are present may be erroneous. Encounter implies a "being-together" (Binswanger, 1956, p. 144) with one another in genuine presence whether in sameness or in diversity. Relationship presumes that positive factors are present. That positive factors are not present in the interview does not represent a deficit or pathological view. It merely acknowledges that past interactions with others, dominant group/minority group pairings in particular, have not incorporated the positive factors usually described or inferred in a relationship.

The interview is an encounter where both parties are in the presence of each other, unsure of the outcome of the meeting, but hoping that a positive interaction can occur if each is able to share, participate, and come to understand the meaning of what they hope to accomplish. This is even more significant when a minority group client has come to the meeting voluntarily because, in spite of the ever-present experience of racism, the interview can be an encounter--a fresh start where each can learn to understand and respect the other, share, and learn to facilitate freedom in both. Beyond this point, a foundation can be established for future positive interactions. The advantage in recognizing stylized differences in individuals or groups is that the strengths can be translated into learning experiences and used to build meaningful relationships.

Special Environment

The counseling interview represents a special environment which facilitates the growth of clients. Minorities, however, rarely experience its counterpart in daily living. Within the counseling setting counselor behavior is usually facilitative; outside of the setting, it is often contradictory. Sorting out these conflicting behaviors and determining their relevance and meaning can be confusing for minority group clients. This confusion may be compounded by clients' unfamiliarity with counseling, with the need for verbal lucidity and introspection, and sometimes with the client's inability to communicate fluently in counselor language and the counselor's inability to communicate in client language. For the interview to have meaning, counselors must make a conscious effort to clarify the purpose of the meeting and the direction it will take.

Guidelines

Mutual learnings about gaps in experiences and expectations and how these are to be negotiated are basic to helping minorities' freedom of movement and their ability to cope effectively in the environments in which they live. The willingness to learn and to negotiate conveys respect for the person with whom the counselor is interacting. It communicates, implicitly, that both have something to contribute, to share, and to learn. There is no "How To Do It In Three Easy Lessons"; the crucial variable has to do with attitudes. The climate must allow minority group participants to share strengths and areas for improvement as defined by them, and encourage movement toward a readiness to accept, evaluate, and learn from the experiences of counselors.

Minority group clients can be helped to handle the realities of their environments because they know and understand the cultural context in which their activities are defined now and in the predicted future. Hence, identifying the goals of counseling must always involve clients. Counselors' knowledge of minority group clients' cultural background increases their understanding of client problems and helps

in the selection of meaningful goals.

What counselors may consider to be abnormal for minority group clients may be considered normal by the persons themselves. It depends on who is doing the defining. Possibly many minority group clients have found themselves in "helping activities" where, because the frames of reference were different, their concerns and modes of expression were not considered normal, i.e., they were not reflective of the dominant group's point of view. Counselors must understand that minority group clients have the right to define their problems in their own way and not be regarded as abnormal. It is a matter of perspective.

The goals of counseling need to be consistent with the realities of what is possible within the culture of minority clients because it is their reference point. Researchers have observed that when mental health workers were confronted with cultural differences, the goals of treatment were not clearly defined; and when they were, they were usually not defined in terms of the problem and perspectives of the people involved (Dugger, 1975).

Counselors can help clients to identify and explore options and to realize that, while they may be faced with restrictive environments, they can still exercise personal choice. Clients can be helped to understand that making choices is not always easy, that more often than not it is both difficult and painful.

In clarifying the issues, counselors can help clients to focus on what they want, to decide how they wish to define their lives, to understand that they have the personal power to reach their desired goals. The next step would be to explore considerations, e.g., values, education, or family, which could accelerate or retard movement toward the goals. The third step would be to take action based on the understanding gained. It is helpful to realize that no person can control time. Things do not always happen according to our desired personal timetables, but if individuals have clarified what it is they want and have chosen and pursued their options, the outcomes are much more likely to be favorable.

Techniques

When browsing through most bookstores, it is common to find a large variety of "How To..." books on practically any subject. This "How To..." phenomenon can also be found in counseling literature as it pertains to relations with minority group persons.

In a profession where the self and one's affective qualities are so crucial to the performance of the activity, it would seem that the real emphasis would be placed on understanding persons as human beings rather than on techniques because understanding provides a basis for mutual respect. May (1973) has pointed out that a chief block to understanding human beings in western culture is the overemphasis on technique, "an overemphasis which goes along with the tendency to see the human being as an object to be calculated, managed and 'analyzed'... Techniques follow understanding" (p. 142). Without understanding, techniques are meaningless because understanding activates the human qualities within individuals. The suggestions shared here grew out of an examination of ways in which climates for mutual growth could be established.

It cannot be overemphasized that the way to establish positive relationships with minority group persons, or with any persons for that matter, and to create a climate conducive to their growth, is to consider them first as human beings. Through the author's years of observing and interacting with counselors-in-training, it was always revealing to note their preoccupation with what to do and say next. This caused the trainees to neglect almost completely the fact that they were in the presence of other human beings.

In interacting with minority group persons from this country and others, one of the first things learned was that, essentially, they do not understand what professional counseling is. Regardless of the circumstances that cause the meeting to occur, the counselor represents one stranger trained to help another stranger with nonphysical concerns. It should be kept in mind that for these persons,

such functions are traditionally performed by friends, family, ministers, and often teachers--persons who are already known and trusted. Both the verbal and the nonverbal language of the clients communicates their unfamiliarity with the counseling activity.

Counselors have at least two choices for action: (1) Assume that mere exposure is sufficient for clients to learn about the activity and proceed as with persons who are familiar with counseling; or (2) Acknowledge that the activity is unfamiliar and seek to create a climate where mutual learning and understanding can occur. First and foremost, recognizing that clients are human beings helps to direct the focus more on similarities than on differences.

Initial Interview

Since the counseling interview is the major vehicle for interacting with most clients, it assumes special importance in interactions with minority group persons because it provides the opportunity for counselor and client to learn about each other and for the client to understand the counseling activity. In the initial interview counselors may be unable to "get right to the business at hand." Recognizing that assumptions about the counseling process as reflected in most of the literature may not hold true for minority group clients, counselors must seek early in the interview to understand the nature of the contact from the client's point of view. They may find that seeking counseling was not the client's idea.

Counselors should be attuned to underlying dynamics of superior/subordinate perceptions of both themselves and their clients. With minority group persons, many helping contacts have involved superior/subordinate interactions, for example, supervisors/employees and health professionals/clients. There is no reason for minority group clients to expect that patterns represented in the counseling activity would be otherwise. Recognition of these dynamics should give counselors insight into factors which may influence client expectations of the

activity as well as some understanding of the often-complained-about minority group client's verbal unresponsiveness.

Counselors should seek to establish a partnership where both parties are able to explore concerns. In so doing, counselors must be prepared to deal with personal questions which might be directed toward themselves, without shifting the focus of the meeting away from the client. Personal questions of the counselor do not seem unreasonable if one considers that in answering them, the counselor becomes less of a stranger to the client. Establishing this partnership is a continuous process wherein one is trying to understand what is happening in the life of the other from the other's point of view.

There are some practical factors counselors may want to consider before holding the initial interview with minority group clients.

Seating arrangements. Some observations by researchers in this area may prove helpful. Four interpersonal distance zones have been identified by Hall (1966) as characteristic of the dominant group culture: intimate (contact to eighteen inches); personal (from one-and-one-half feet to four feet); social (from four feet to twelve feet); and public (greater than twelve feet, as with speeches). Sue and Sue (1977) observed that some minorities share closer personal distances than are normally comfortable for dominant group persons. Closer personal distances, however, are more likely to occur in intragroup rather than intergroup combinations, at least initially.

In counseling interactions involving dominant group/minority group combinations, dominant group counselors, more often than not, assume intimate interpersonal distances. If the counseling activity is like most other social interactions and human pairings (Matarazzo, 1973), violation of minorities' intimate interpersonal space would be consistent with the American tradition. Many minorities of various status or rank can confirm that dominant cultural members, males in particular, though total strangers, will put their hands on the shoulders of minority group persons at the most inappropriate times. They may

use other gestures, but this seems to be the most common. They may do this because they want to show that they are friendly, because of superior/subordinate dynamics which have operated in prior minority group interactions, or because of insensitivity to differing client perceptions of personal space. It is suggested that, in an interview, such a gesture can be interpreted as a symbol of disrespect when both parties do not hold similar perceptions and expectations of the counseling activity.

Within this context, counselors might wish to consider placing the chairs at an interpersonal distance of about three feet. Counselors can suggest that the seating may be changed, if desired. They will probably find that when they behave as human beings rather than as technicians, clients will move their chairs closer either during the initial interview or in subsequent ones, if they return.

Structuring. Remembering that coming to the counseling interview may have been someone else's idea, the counselor may wish to share information about the activity to be undertaken. This sharing can begin with an inquiry as to whether the clients have previously engaged in professional counseling. If so, counselors may wish to invite the clients to share their perceptions of the experience--if not, to share their perceptions or expectations of the activity or how they happened to come to counseling. Some discussion of what is or will be involved in the activity can provide a basis for further exploration.

Structuring helps clients to relax and influences their expectations by providing a frame of reference in which they can choose to operate. There is no substitute for "common sense," and if counselors do not want to pursue these courses of action, they must find others more consistent with their own way of behaving because clients can sense insincerity. Can not you?

Names and titles of address. Dominant cultural group members tend to use first names and/or to shorten particularly long or difficult-to-pronounce names. No doubt this custom is a part of the culture; however, imposing this standard on minority group members does not consider their

point of view. Counselors should take time to learn clients' names and to pronounce them correctly. Even if they have to pronounce the name several times or spell it phonetically, doing so communicates respect. It indicates that counselors consider the clients important enough to learn and pronounce their names correctly. Perhaps both counselor and client will later choose to use nicknames or first names, but there should be a choice.

The use of Mr., Mrs., or Miss as titles of respect has historically been denied minorities by dominant group members. Again, this is a matter of choice. This observation is made only to suggest a factor counselors may want to consider, particularly with older minority group members.

Language

Language is the major vehicle for counseling. The activity requires verbal lucidity and introspection. Failure to understand another's language, both explicitly and implicitly, means failure to comprehend much of another's culture (Vontress, 1974). Difficulty sometimes occurs at the explicit level when the language is different, and at the implicit level when gestures, postures, and inflections are unfamiliar.

If counselors have acknowledged the clients as human beings, the basis for experiencing mutual growth has been established so that while language difficulties may be barriers, they will not preclude movement within the interview. If counselors are being honest and sincere, they can ask clients for clarification when there are meanings which are not mutually understood and invite clients to do the same. The interchange or mutual checking for accuracy of meanings communicates interest in knowing precisely what clients mean and caring that the meanings are understood.

Understanding Clients Impressionistically

There are a number of ways in which counselors may learn to know and understand clients and their culture and increase clients' verbal

interactions.

1. Exploration of lifestyles. This exploration can begin with simple open-ended statements or questions designed to learn more about the culture of clients. The content of this exchange should be interest areas identified by either clients or counselors.

2. Exploration of educational experiences. This exploration can include information about formal or other training and educational systems and experiences unique to the culture of particular clients or their perceptions of it. Counselors will likely learn of many discrepancies in minority and dominant group educational systems and may get to know many persons who have made the best of a bad situation.

3. Exploration of work history. Learning what clients have done in both paid and unpaid work experiences will lend insight into society's influences on minority group employment as well as special talents clients may have.

4. Exploration of interests. Through exploration of interests counselors can become attuned to those interests expressed by clients and can note how they have been manifested in clients' lives. The information will be useful in helping clients define what they want.

5. Exploration of special skills. Counselors can ask clients what they perceive to be their special abilities and also tap into what others have sought out clients to perform. This aspect of understanding clients can be quite revealing. During such an interaction many minority group clients have been found to have extraordinary talents and skills. By objective measurements many may be considered barely literate and may sometimes be labeled retarded, but an exploration of special skills may reveal that they have built houses, including installing plumbing and electricity; have assembled and disassembled automobiles, other motor vehicles, and appliances since childhood; have collections of paintings they have done over a number of years; and have a wealth of other skills and talents which are unrecognized outside of their immediate environment but which can have a direct impact on obtaining future employment. Many persons are not

aware that such skills can and should be included on job application forms.

By taking time to explore these areas in the lives of clients, counselors can learn much about clients and their culture. Counselors can observe the manner in which clients express themselves, note what meanings they attach to various events, and, in the process, significantly increase clients' verbal activity. These important data would probably not be tapped through objective resources.

Explorations during initial contacts with minority group clients help to establish both as partners with desire and need for mutual learning. Each begins to experience the other in the various dimensions of the other's life and to build a relationship.

Implications for Personal and Professional Development

Many among the readers of this monograph are aware of who you are; have defined what you want; and have examined, in varying degrees, the psychological, physiological, and spiritual dimensions of your existence. For those of you who have not begun this process, personal exploration is a starting point. If you have chosen to interact with others in a helping capacity, self-examination is necessary to ensure that you have clarified the meaning of your life or at least have put into perspective the way you have chosen to function in the world. Some of this examination may be solitary, some in conjunction with others--not so much because you need other persons to help define you, but because in so doing you can share personal power. In this process of sharing, change is stimulated--not only in you but in the persons with whom you are involved.

You may also wish to look at your professional activity, counseling, from two perspectives. The first would be as it is or has been represented in your training, in the counseling literature, and in your experience. Compare and contrast your findings. How and in what ways have you and your behavior been consistent and reflective of ideals

embodied in the process? What recommendations would you make to yourself for improvement? What actions are you prepared to do? What risks are you prepared to take? Because as a counselor, you hold expectations for your clients, you must also hold high expectations for yourself and your own growth.

From a second perspective, consider that you are a person who, in various social interactions with counseling practitioners, has been treated with dislike, consistent disrespect, contempt, and/or other negative aspects of human interaction. How would you regard the activity? What could you do? What would you do? What kinds of things might you do as the counselor that would bring about positive change?

To seek to enhance the self-esteem of other persons is a tall order because it presumes that the person who is to perform the task has most personal factors in order. The state of interpersonal interactions within this country and the world suggests that this is not true for most individuals, that we all have much work to do.

Counselors have a special responsibility to understand more than one frame of reference because of the numbers and variety of persons they have the potential to impact--especially in today's world where they are expected to provide effective helping services to all persons. The best approach in any setting is to respond to clients as human beings. Understand that the capacity for you to respond in this way is with you at this very moment. It is a matter of whether you know clearly the personal power in you and others, and even more, whether you want to be in touch with that knowledge. The choice remains with you.

Support groups of other professional staff can be helpful in promoting personal growth among helping professionals. The exact structure of these peer groups can be defined by those involved. They can gather monthly, bimonthly, or as needed to consider, discuss, and clarify professional issues; give and receive feedback in areas identified by each participant; or define and deal with other issues important to the group members.

Summary

Throughout this monograph, the approach identified as being most useful is one which considers clients as human beings and utilizes all the qualities of humanness. Such an approach helps counselors and clients to establish a mutual frame of reference from which to interact whether they are of the same or different groups. The approach also affects the attitudes of counselors and helps them to focus on human similarities rather than differences. With an understanding of humanness, its capacities for love and choice, and the changes which can be brought about by the acknowledgment of both, preoccupation with techniques will be lessened and the quality of existence on the part of both counselors and clients will be enhanced.

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